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THE GOVERNMENT INFORMATION LOCATOR SERVICE BOARD

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Deputy Secretary of Commerce, David Barram, serving as the Chair, convened the first meeting of the Government Information Locator Service (GILS) Board on December 6, 1995, at 10:00 a.m., in conference room 4830, of the U.S. Department of Commerce's Herbert C. Hoover Building. The Hoover Building is located at 14th & Constitution Ave, NW, Washington, D.C.

He welcomed the attendees and remarked that it had been about one year (December 7, 1994), since he announced GILS on behalf of the Secretary of Commerce, Ronald Brown, the Chair of the Administration's Information Infrastructure Task Force, and also since the signing of the Federal Information Processing Standard 192 which sets out the technical specifications for GILS. He noted that on that same day, Sally Katzen, the Administrator of OMB's Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (OIRA), announced the signing of OMB Bulletin 95-01 which sets out the policy underpinnings of GILS. GILS received its statutory basis during May 1995 when the President signed into law the Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA) of 1995.

Dep. Sec. Barram thanked Eliot Christian of the Geological Survey and the staffs of the National Archives and Records Administration, the Government Printing Office, and the Interior Department's Geological Survey, for their fine work in assisting the agencies that have been at work developing their GILS implementation. Before introducing the Board, he stated that there would be four informational presentations followed by three business items on the agenda prior to opening the meeting for public discussion.

In his introduction of the Board members, Dep. Sec. Barram again recognized Sally Katzen as the OMB representative. He then welcomed: Governor John Carlin, Archivist of the United States; Mike DiMario, Public Printer; Hiram Davis, Deputy Librarian of Congress; Frank McDonough, representing the General Services Administration; and Robert Lamb, representing the Interior Department. Following the introduction of the Board members, Dep. Sec. Barram introduced Sally Katzen who provided a "charge to the Board".

Sally Katzen thanked David Barram for agreeing to Chair the group. She began by emphasizing the importance of GILS as a valuable component of the National Information Infrastructure which will identify information resources throughout the government and make the information more accessible to the public and agencies. GILS will also improve agencies ability to: carry out their records management responsibilities; respond to Freedom of Information Act requests; and make existing information more readily available for sharing among agencies. She informed the members that the PRA requires the Board to advise the Secretary of Commerce on the development of technical standards for the service. The Board should also consider public access and other user needs, examine the security and integrity of the service, and review its development and effectiveness. She remarked that the first milestone of GILS implementation, scheduled for December 31, 1995, is almost here. This is the date that agencies are required to have their initial GILS inventories available electronically. Most have made progress and some are already operational.

PRESENTATIONS

Eliot Christian

Dep. Sec. Barram thanked Sally Katzen and introduced Eliot Christian as the first presenter of four scheduled presentations. Eliot provided an excellent overview of GILS which consisted of a tutorial on locators, a statement of GILS principles, and a report of the current status of GILS in terms of policy and technology. With respect to locators, his presentation covered the topic from its definition, through examples of different types of locators, and finally to how they are created and used. Locators describe information in many forms and can be represented in any media. Eliot stated that the basic principles of GILS are: the adoption of open standards; the support of a diversity of sources; the sensitivity to international languages and standards; the accommodation of copyright, security, and privacy mechanisms; and the extensibility of information extracted from data.

He reported that the Federal government has established strong policies that pertain to GILS or are GILS-related and that the states and foreign countries are actively pursuing GILS and its standards. However, in closing, he cautioned that there is still much to do and that it is still an open question whether or not a world-wide open information infrastructure will be successfully implemented.

Kurt Mulholm

Dep. Sec. Barram thanked Eliot Christian for his presentation and introduced Kurt Mulholm, the Administrator of the Defense Technical Information Center (DTIC), Department of Defense (DOD), to demonstrate DOD's implementation of GILS. Kurt began his presentation by introducing Tammy Borkowski as his associate who would demonstrate the on-line DOD GILS System. Kurt then explained that the DOD GILS system resided on DOD's World Wide Web information service, DefenseLINK, managed by the DOD Office of Public Affairs. He added that Ms. Borkowski, who designed the on-line system, also provided e-mail and floppy disk input capability in recognition that DOD's input providers are disbursed throughout the world. Before turning the presentation over to Tammy, he praised the interagency sharing of knowledge and work effort that has characterized the GILS development environment.

Tammy then conducted the software demonstration on-line via the World Wide Web. Her impressive demonstration consisted of showing how data are inputted to a DefenseLINK Locator Record and how the search and retrieval capabilities of the system operate using a Z39.50 browser add-on for Netscape in Windows.

Keith Belton

Next, Dep. Sec. Barram introduced Mr. Belton from SOLINET, an Internet Service provider. Keith is working with a group of Southeastern states to adapt GILS as a strategic move to enhance their regional information infrastructure. Dep. Sec. Barram remarked that he was especially proud that the GILS concept is being adapted by the States to improve economic development.

Keith described SOLINET's role in the project to develop a Regional Information Service in the southeastern states that will provide access to government information access across jurisdictional boundaries and various levels of governance. He said that at a planning session held in June 1995, participants from 14 states recommended that standards should drive the project and that information for economic development should be the focus of a pilot project. They selected GILS as the most appropriate standard for developing a regional economic database and for its potential for integrating state and Federal locator resources. At the last September 1995 meeting of the Southern Governors Association, the governors decided to make the development of a regional economic database as one of their priority tasks for the coming year.

Keith then presented several issues for consideration by the GILS Board. The Board should consider supporting state efforts to adopt GILS, including encouraging their participation in training programs, and establishing a working group on adoption of GILS at other levels of government. Another issue that he raised was the integration of state and Federal data sources. Dep. Sec. Barram thanked Keith for attending and commented that implementing a regional economic database sounded like an excellent project.

Wayne Kelley

The last presentation was the Government Printing Office (GPO) Pathway Service introduced by Wayne Kelley, Superintendent of Documents, GPO. Mr. Kelley began by saying GILS is a rich and extensible source of government information and various segments of our society will approach GILS from different perspectives. He said the GPO approach is from the point of view of government document librarians and citizens interested in government documents. Moreover, the Pathway Service continues GPO's traditional roles of providing directories and access to government documents and uses electronic technology to achieve significant improvements in service. Wayne then introduced Maggie Parhamovich and Reann Dossett, Internet consultants and key members of the GPO Pathway Service project, to conduct the on-line demonstration.

Reann provided the narrative and Maggie operated the on-line computer interface. Reann explained that the Pathways System is accessed via the on-line GPO Access and will eventually include GILS databases from more than 20 different agencies that have contracted with GPO to put their GILS records on the GPO server. Users can access Pathways by: using the web services; telneting to GPO's WAIS; using a PC-based client; or in the absence of an Internet connection, entering in through the Federal Depository libraries. Reann showed how users can search all agencies' GILS records, or a single agency's database, on specified words or phrases to retrieve the text for review. The search can encompass the full text of the GILS records or be narrowed to concentrate on one or more specific fields. Reann also described the pointer records in the system that provide a direct link to the GILS record inventories of the other Federal departments and independent agencies that are not located on the GPO server. This capability gives users of the Federal Depository Library and others an excellent focal point to access all government GILS records. Reann asked for agency feedback on the Pathways initiative.

BUSINESS ITEMS

Having thanked the GPO presenters for their contribution, Dep. Sec. Barram said there were three business items on the agenda with each presentation taking about five minutes. He then introduced Governor John Carlin, the Archivist of the United States, to discuss the issue of how privacy act systems are described in GILS and then discuss the need for an evaluation of GILS.

Governor John Carlin

Gov. Carlin stated that the issue regarding the requirement for agencies to describe their Privacy Act Systems in GILS and also include them in the Federal Register has been resolved. He said that the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) has established a partnership with GPO to provide the public with access to Privacy Act Notices on GPO Access, a GILS compliant server. Previously, agencies expressed concern about the responsibility to describe their Privacy Act Systems on GILS when they already had an obligation to describe them in the Federal Register. Gov. Carlin reported that effective December 31, 1995, agencies need only to include a pointer record in their GILS database that points to GPO Access. Also, NARA will distribute a model GILS record to the agencies that contains essential information for the pointer record.

With respect to the second matter, Gov. Carlin emphasized the importance of understanding how well GILS is meeting user information need. Therefore, he proposed that an evaluation be conducted in 1996 that focuses on who has been using GILS, how well their needs have been served, and what, if any modifications are needed to improve service to the public. In addition, he recommended that a final report on the evaluation be submitted to the Board by the end of 1996. In conclusion, he proposed that designated members of the Board be instructed to determine who should conduct the evaluation and how it should be conducted. Gov. Carlin said he would ask his staff to convene the first meeting of the representatives in January 1996.

Dep. Sec. Barram asked for a motion on the proposal for an evaluation of GILS. The motion was made, seconded, and carried by the members.

Michael DiMario

Dep. Sec. Barham introduced Mr. DiMario, the Public Printer, to discuss the work that GPO is doing helping the agencies get started using GILS as well as plans for a GILS point of access.

Mike expressed his pleasure in being able to participate with the Executive Branch in the worthwhile endeavor to improve the dissemination of government information to the public. He remarked that although the demonstration of GPO Access focused on GILS support in the form of high-level agency records, GPO's major thrust is providing GILS compliant servers for mounting GILS for other agencies. He said that 20 agencies had already committed to locate their records on the GILS server in the form of ASCII text. Once resident on GPO Access, agencies can establish a "hot link" from GILS master records to the database(s) on remote server sites. In addition, GPO has provided a World Wide Web service to increase user access to GILS information.

Mike DiMario explained that GPO was able to provide low cost GILS support services to agencies because of the economies of scale resulting from GPO's investment in GPO Access for the Congressional Record and Federal Register. He also expressed his gratitude to Eliot Christian for his advice and guidance to GPO regarding GILS. In addition, he announced that GPO was now making GPO Access free to the public. He said that previously, fee free service was only free to the Federal Depository libraries or a depository gateway.

In conclusion, Mike stated that GPO believes that GILS fills a need for a central, consistent, comprehensive, collection of data about the government's information products and that GPO looked forwarded to assisting its development and growth.

Dep. Sec. Barram thanked Mike and reiterated the point that agencies should post the address of their GILS' sites on the GILS List to facilitate the establishment of GPO's "point of access" and to make those addresses more easily available to other organizations which may wish to serve as GILS intermediaries.

Steve Hufford

Dep. Sec. Barram then introduced Steve Hufford, EPA, to discuss the work of the existing "GILS Subgroup" and how they can support the wishes of the Board.

Steve began his remarks by saying that the GILS Subgroup is a virtual community of Federal agencies and departments, GILS implementors, commercial interests, information advocacy groups and others and is open to all. He noted that the GILS Subgroup has met monthly for the past year with a focus on sharing information and resolving technical issues related to GILS development.

Steve stated that it was his intent to inform the Board that the Subgroup exists and is a valuable resource for the Board. Accordingly, he suggested a variety of ways that the GILS Subgroup could provide support to the Board. He said that in addition to having the Subgroup undertake Board projects, they might also consider using the Subgroup to: help design and participate in GILS evaluation; bring policy and operational issues to the Boards attention; serve as a channel for communications and outreach; promote coordination with other Federal information locator initiatives; and provide liaison to other governmental level, GILS-related initiatives (states and international).

Dep. Sec. Barram thanked Steve for his presentation and commended the GILS subgroup for the good work that has already been done and expressed his wish that the Subgroup continue its work.

PUBLIC COMMENTS:

Following the scheduled portion of the agenda, Dep. Sec. Barram opened the discussion to members of the public. He asked that each speaker please restrict the length of their remarks so that others might also have sufficient time to speak.

Patrice McDermott

Ms. McDermott, OMB Watch, began her presentation by applauding the progress that agencies have made in identifying and beginning the process of cataloging their information products. She noted, however, that much remains to be done in terms of policy, meaningful access, and public participation. She said that agencies are concentrating on making Web sites available to the public, but few have provided access to the information and data they have collected. Consequently, agencies need to put more information and databases on-line. In addition, agencies need to prepare a comprehensive plan to include identifying what information should be made available to the public and how the information will be accessed. GILS is only one piece of this plan.

Ms. McDermott reminded the audience that many people do not have access to advanced technology and that other means of access, including the Federal depository libraries, need to be employed and supported as effective alternatives. Issues, such as these, need to be addressed by OMB in developing future policy for the access to Federal government information.

Patrice said that when OMB Bulletin 95-01established the GILS Board, no members of the public, the people using GILS, were included and that this is unacceptable. Consequently, public participation in GILS is minimal. In conclusion, she emphasized that the following questions need to be addressed:

- How will the Federal government provide access to those individuals who do not have access to the World Wide Web?
- How can E-mail documents continue to be excluded from the GILS core records?
- Will the Federal government establish common keyword identifiers for all government information?
- How will the Federal government determine what information citizens want/need?
- How will the Federal government determine user satisfaction with GILS and involve the public and public interest directly in recommending future enhancement and policy directions for GILS?

Ms. McDermott's talk stimulated considerable discussion by the Board members.

Sally Katzen said that although this is a period of scarce resources, the Administration has a strong commitment for supporting GILS and that OMB is doing their utmost to preserve it. She also took issue with Patrice over whether agencies are wrongly investing in establishing Web sites without access to information sources by emphasizing that the ultimate objective is to put agency information on-line. Moreover, agencies cannot put up every piece of information in their inventory immediately. Therefore the Web sites serve both as means of generating pubic interest and as a logical point of departure for the expansion of the information collections that can be accessed.

Dep. Sec. Barram continued by saying it is his view that this Administration is very oriented for government towards public access and customer satisfaction. He expressed his viewpoint that we must avoid investing resources in making sure that there are multiple ways of getting the information to people who do not have access to it. Rather, we should concentrate on making sure we have access for everybody someplace using the same way of accessing the information.

Patrice McDermott responded to Dep. Sec. Barram's statement by saying that is why OMB Watch was asking for a comprehensive policy.

Dep. Sec. Barram added that he thought most organizations are stronger when they compete with each other for the most satisfied customers.

John Carlin pointed out that the proposal he made for a GILS evaluation was oriented towards the customer, and the Board is not totally out of line on this matter.

Patrice agreed that although the proposed survey of the public and agency uses was a good first step she felt that there should be public involvement in the Board decision-making.

Mike DiMario commented that the Congress, in the GPO Appropriation Act, mandated that he commission a task force to examine electronic delivery and access services to the depository community. This will be an on-going project which requires a report back to Congress this year. Although not stated, there was a strong implication that the task force would include members of the public.

Robert Lamb expressed his uncertainty over the What that will be surveyed in the proposed evaluation. He stated that the evaluation would focus on the Who and How and that Patrice had raised important questions about the data and information distributed on-line. The questions of at what point data becomes information and should be made available to the public does need to be looked at by the Board. However, he said it would be hard to have a comprehensive policy.

Frank McDonough asked Eliot Christian to expand on his voiced concern about the possibility of being unable to achieve the goal of a world-wide, open, information network. He also asked for Eliot's thoughts on where we will end up as a society at the end of the century and what might be the potential barriers.

Eliot Christian responded by saying that the critical thing that he saw occurring was a dangerous trend towards vertically integrated information, content owners and distributors. If a few powerful media or communication giants control the channels of information, the opportunity to have an open network for public access to information might be lost. Rather, the concept behind GILS envisions many ways to find many things. In addition, Eliot noted that commercial organizations are making decision now which will influence communications and information access five to ten years into the future.

Dep. Sec. Barram presented, by contrast, a more optimistic scenario by saying that there is a powerful feeling in America that there are other ways of doing things. At the turn of the century, things will be dramatically different from the way we think now, communicate, and process information. We will look back to 1995 and wonder what we were worrying about. Addressing Eliot, he commented that although we have to worry a little bit about the future, the history of technology has demonstrated we have always been able to innovate ourselves out of potential or real trouble.

James McDonough

Dep. Sec. Barram recognized the next speaker, Mr. McDonough, the Editor of the Electronic Public Information Newsletter. James stated that his organization has done a survey of the agencies to see how they were doing about implementing GILS. They observed that the majority of agencies planned to put something up on the Internet for GILS. However, they also observed little, if any, coordination between the agency GILS implementors and the agency Public Affairs offices. Public Affairs is the office that interfaces with the public and deals with public policy and what is distributed. In addition, the IRM people, who were implementing GILS, had low level coordinating committees which were not hooked into the agency policy making appartus. Moreover, they did not get the impression that the agencies viewed GILS as an instrument that they could use to help themselves and the public.

Dep. Sec Barram thanked James for his observations and recognized the next speaker.

Anne A. Hennue

Ms. Hennue, the Associate Director of the Washington Office, American Library Association, introduced herself and responded to Dep. Sec. Barram's earlier reference to making sure we have access for everybody, the nation's have and have not, with regard to information. She emphasized that the Federal Depository Library Program is the

infrastructure that has been in place for over a century to provide that access. It is a partnership between the Federal government and libraries around the country to provide access to government information in a variety of formats. Anne concluded her remarks by emphasizing that the library program is for the public, where they can come for the kind of help that they need in order to use this vast treasure house of information resources.

Dep. Sec. Barram responded by saying he sensed a tremendous rejuvenation in America as the potential of the library back to earlier year as the central point of information. He jokingly added that because of this, he would not mind buying stock in the depository library program if it ever went public.

Anne answered that the program had already gone public, and he was, as a taxpayer, getting a great return on his investment.

CONCLUSION

Dep. Sec. Barram closed the meeting by first asking for any additional comments from the audience and Board members and then stated that the minutes of the meeting will be posted on the GILS List-Server. The minutes of the meeting will serve as the first report of the Board. He thanked the attendees and added that further meetings of the Board would be scheduled as the need arises.

[Available: URL: <http://www.usgs.gov/gils/board95.txt>]